

1st Address
1689. 27.
1795
ACCOUNT

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

AT

A GENERAL MEETING

OF

The London Corresponding Society,

CONVENED BY PUBLIC ADVERTISEMENT,

AND HELD IN

AN INCLOSED FIELD, BEHIND THE LONG ROOM,

BOROUGH ROAD, ST. GEORGE'S FIELDS,

On MONDAY, the 29th of JUNE, 1795.

CITIZEN JOHN GALE JONES IN THE CHAIR.

[PRICE TWO PENCE.]

ACCOUNT

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PROCEEDINGS,

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A GENERAL MEETING of the LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY having been proposed and approved of by a very considerable majority, Advertisements were issued to convene the Members for the purpose of considering the best means of obtaining *Universal Suffrage* and *Annual Parliaments*: accordingly, on *Monday* the 29th of *June*, 1795, the Society met in an inclosed Field, near the *Obelisk*, in *St. George's Fields*; and about three o'clock, P.M. Citizen JONES, being appointed Chairman, rose and addressed them in the following manner:—

CITIZENS!

IT is with infinite satisfaction that I behold here assembled, on this day, so very numerous and so respectable a meeting: it presents indeed to my view a spectacle at once sublime and awful, since it seems as if the whole British Nation had convened itself upon this extraordinary occasion to witness the propriety of our conduct, and testify for the legality of our proceedings. They will not, I believe, be disappointed. We meet for no other than our original purpose, a Parliamentary Reform, and disclaim all intention of tumult or violence. I hope, by our firm, yet moderate conduct, we shall gain the good will and concurrence of all who are here present, and convince them that we are, as we ever have been, the sincere advocates and steady promoters of universal peace and tranquillity. The immediate objects to which I would call your attention are,—an *Address to the Nation*, another *to the King*, and a few Resolutions expressive of the present situation of the country, and our determination to pursue, by every legal and constitutional method, the best means of obtaining our natural Rights, *Universal Suffrage*, and *Annual Parliaments*.

Address to the Nation.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS!

AFTER the lapse of more than a twelve-month, replete with fearful agitation and alarm, the LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY, still firm in its principles, and faithful to its original purpose, again offers itself to your notice, and solicits your immediate attention. Never at any time, from the rude institutions of uncultivated ignorance, to the more polished periods of modern refinement, has there been submitted to the consideration of man a more awful or a more critical moment! It is, indeed, a moment worthy of serious deliberation. To be guilty of rashness or intemperance would serve only to prejudice and inflame; yet to be wholly silent, would betray a criminal indifference.

While the slow, yet steady progression of human improvement, by exciting curiosity, and awakening inquiry, has produced in all countries an insensible revolution of opinion: mankind, as yet unaccustomed to great and novel changes, has too often been inclined to treat them as visionary and impracticable, and has refused to countenance or approve what it has not yet experienced. Hence may we readily account for the existence and perpetuation of abuses, which, having originated in ignorance, are afterwards continued from habit, and supported by folly; hence may we be easily led to distinguish that servile and accommodating disposition which prefers a partial evil to an uncertain good, and contents itself with pursuing the beaten track of uniformity, while it dreads to venture into the unknown, though alluring, path of innovation.

But, with nations as with individuals, it sometimes happens, that the *Hour of Danger is the Hour of Inquiry*; and what would have been withheld from the calm remonstrances of reason is often yielded to the strong impulse of necessity.

At such a time, and in so critical a situation, the collision of contending interests, and the rude shock of adverse powers, are for a while the only arguments of application, and the only effectual means of redress! All deliberation is suspended, and the mind looks forward with a fearful horror to the termination of the dreadful contest! Happy the nation which, by lenient and gentle methods, can supersede the necessity of so desperate a remedy!—Happy the people, who are not *compelled* to recur to this ultimate and awful appeal!

To prevent confusion, and preserve tranquillity, is the indispensable duty of every individual, who would enjoy the comforts and protection of civil society; it is necessary, therefore, that he should at all times, and at all hazards, exert his utmost to warn his Fellow Citizens of their impending danger, and oppose the artful and ambitious designs of those who, under miserable pretences, would enslave and destroy his country. It is not enough that he should boldly disseminate his opinions and propagate his principles; that he should associate with men of similar sentiments and similar views; but he must also, if occasion require, cheerfully consent to be selected from the aggregate mass, **AND DIE IN THEIR DEFENCE!**

It is now near four years since we first called your attention to the circumstances of the times, and to the situation of your country: if it were necessary *then* to associate, how much more is that necessity *now* increased! We felt it our duty to unite and proclaim our grievances, those grievances are augmented tenfold; and is this a time to be silent or abandon our cause? We believed a Parliamentary Reform to be the only means of preserving our country from destruction, and is our persuasion become less firm, or are our opinions altered? Did we not foresee the calamities which must result from the want of a fair and equal Representation of the People of Britain in the Commons House of Parliament, and call on the united energies of the country to assert its rights? And is it a time to relinquish all further exertions, and desert our principles? Surely not! The public mind is at length roused to a sense of its situation; it sees the dreadful precipice on which it stands; it encourages us to proceed

in our useful and virtuous career, and assures us it will second our endeavours. Yes, Britons! you begin to exert the privilege of thinking, and mental energy will soon be succeeded by determined resolution! You will not quietly see your country laid in ruins, to gratify the lofty arrogance of an insolent Administration! You will not much longer permit your Fellow-Citizens to be dragged from their peaceful occupations to fight against the Liberties of Mankind, nor suffer your Wives and Children to be robbed of that scanty loaf, which, instead of preserving them from starving, is sent to feed subsidized Cut-throats and foreign Mercenaries! Away with cold calculations of safety or prudence—with paltry expedients and ill-timed fears! It is necessary for all honest men to speak out, *the Times and the Country demand it!* Are we Men, and shall we not speak? Are we BRITONS, and is not LIBERTY our BIRTH-RIGHT! There is no Power on Earth shall silence the Voice of an Injured Nation, or prevent the Progress of Free Inquiry!—Bring forth your Whips and Racks, ye Ministers of Vengeance!—Produce your Scaffolds and your Executioners!—Erect Barracks in every Street, and Bastiles in every Corner!—Persecute and punish every innocent Individual!—but you will *not* succeed! The Voice of Reason, like the Roaring of the Nemean Lion, shall issue even from the Cavern's Mouth!—The holy Blood of Patriotism, streaming from the severing Axe, shall carry with it the Infant Seeds of Liberty, and Men may perish!—but Truth shall be eternal!

While, among other terrible effects of the present cruel and disastrous War, gaunt Famine stalks along your streets, and haggard Wretchedness assails you in every shape; mark, Citizens, the shameful negligence and unfeeling conduct of those who hold that power which ought to be intrusted to none but your *real* Representatives! When a proposition to inquire into the cause of the present scarcity is coldly and reluctantly brought forward, it is in a moment, silenced by the insidious whispers of a Secretary of State, "*that such a Discussion would do more Harm than Good:*" Thus are you left to experience not only the *Humanity* of the present Ministry, in exporting your food

to foreign mercenaries, but are compelled also to endure all the severe extortions of *private Avarice and Monopoly!*

Let us entreat you not to fall into those fatal errors which have so frequently misled our ancestors, nor rest your expectation on that delusive phantom—a Change of Ministers! With *such* an House of Commons, no Ministry *can* perform its Duty to the People!—YOUR CHIEF, PERHAPS YOUR ONLY HOPE, IS IN YOURSELVES!

We call, therefore, upon your native good sense and courage to promote and assist the glorious cause for which we have so long and so peaceably associated: we need not press upon your conviction the necessity of a speedy and effectual Reform, nor repeat the observation which is so loudly echoed from every part of this distracted country, “**THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE!**” If the event of the late State Trials, with which we sincerely congratulate You; if the perseverance we have shewn, and the persecutions we have experienced, have contributed ought to acquit us of all evil intention, and to acquire us your good opinion, we conjure you, by that Freedom we adore, that Constitution we venerate, and that common interest we all possess in the prosperity of our country, to unite your vigorous exertions with ours, and by every legal and constitutional method endeavour to procure to the People of Great Britain their *natural and undoubted Rights*—“**UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS!**”

This Address having been twice read to the Members within the Field; was carried to the Wall opposite the President, which afforded the greatest opportunity of communicating the proceedings to the immense multitude which surrounded the meeting: after which the following **ADDRESS TO THE KING** was brought forward:

TO THE
KING's Most Excellent MAJESTY.

The ADDRESS of the LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY, convened in General Meeting, on Monday the 29th of June, 1795, (**approved also by many thousands of other Inhabitants of London, Westminster, and Southwark, who attended at this said Meeting.*)

SIRE,

IMPRESSED with a sense of the numerous calamities with which our Fellow-Citizens are everywhere oppressed and overwhelmed, and conscious of the rectitude of our intentions, we feel it our duty, at this critical juncture, thus publicly to address you, and claim your favourable attention. In delivering our free and undisguised sentiments, we disclaim all intention of rudeness or incivility; but we disdain also to flatter:—we would speak the honest language of *Freemen*—not practise the fawning fervility of *Slaves*!

We are fully sensible that numerous attempts have been made to misrepresent our object and calumniate our intentions. It has been not only insinuated, but declared, that we are inimical to your person, and averse to your authority; but, convinced as we are, that reflection and experience are not always banished from kingly bosoms, we had hoped that the event of the late Trials would have manifested our innocence, and the increasing distresses of our country have shewn you, that if guilt can

* The words in *Italics* were inserted by the Committee in the Manuscript Copy delivered at the Secretary of State's Office for the Home Department.

any where attach itself, it must be to those who have been constantly endeavouring to poison your ear and pervert your understanding.

Your Ministers have grossly and shamefully deceived you;---they have used your name as a pretext to enslave and destroy the people; and have staked the safety of your Crown for their own Political salvation:---they have set up to sale the Virgin Honours of the State, and violated the fair Fame of the British Constitution!

But it is necessary, Sire, that you should be undeceived; and, if you have not an honest Minister, that will dare to speak the Truth, **THE PEOPLE SHOULD INSTRUCT THEIR SOVEREIGN, AND SAVE HIM FROM DESTRUCTION!**

It is time that you should discern your Friends and detect your Enemies!

We have often fought, at the hazard even of our lives, to preserve you in the enjoyment of what ought at all times to constitute the chief felicity of a Sovereign---*the People's Love*---and to secure you in the happy possession of Peace and universal Tranquillity:

But your Ministers, dreading lest you should have a common interest with the People, have basely slandered us, and represented a considerable part of the British Nation as disaffected and disloyal! By their infamous manœuvres they have betrayed you, and endangered even your safety!---The Nation itself stands tottering upon the Brink of Ruin, and **YOUR EXISTENCE IS COUPLED WITH THEIRS!**

We conjure you, Sire, in the name, and for the sake of that Glorious Revolution, which seated the House of Brunswick on the Throne, to yield a timely attention to the Cries of a suffering People, and to exert that power with which the Constitution has intrusted you;—to give them that free and equal Representation, which can alone enable the British Nation to prevent future and remove the present calamities;—to dismiss from your Councils those guilty Ministers, who have so long with impunity insulted us, and betrayed our dearest interests;—to put an immediate period to the ravages of a cruel and destructive War, and to restore to us that Peace and Tranquillity, which are so essentially necessary for **YOUR OWN PERSONAL SECURITY, AND FOR THE HAPPINESS OF THE PEOPLE!**

The Address to the King was, in the manner already described, communicated, as far as possible, to the company without.

The two Addresses were then put to the Vote.—That to the Nation was unanimously approved; but the Address to the King caused a considerable degree of debate; and which, in all probability, would have been much more extensive, had not the attention of so many of the most active Members been engaged in communicating the proceedings to the remote parts of the Company.

In opposition to the Address it was contended,—That the Society ought to confine its efforts to the dissemination of Political Knowledge among their Countrymen in general; and that every other mode of attempting to attain a redress of grievances would ultimately prove delusive.—That while every means were used to awaken national prejudices against the principles of Liberty, the Society ought not in silence to suffer the introduction of the principles of modern Germany; those principles, by

which Soldiers, who, on all other occasions, are expected to exceed the courage of Lions, are, with respect to their Officers, required to sink beneath the submissiveness of Spaniels---That the late execution of *Parish* and *Cook*, two privates of the Oxfordshire Militia, and the pains which have since been taken to misrepresent their conduct, and injure their characters, furnished no reason to hope any thing from the humanity of the executive part of our Government: it was also contended, that the idea of addressing the King was nugatory, it being understood that some late regulations preclude all possibility of presenting any Address immediately to himself; and that, in passing through the Privy Council, there could be no security that it would not be mutilated or suppressed.

In support of the Address it was urged, that individuals, while forming but a Minority of a Nation, were in duty bound, whatever might be their private opinions, to regulate their public conduct by those institutions which had been sanctioned by the approbation or even acquiescence of their Countrymen---That if the system of Government established in this country was really defective, nothing could tend more directly to expose its defects than the inefficacy of measures adopted in compliance with its doctrines---That the power of reforming the Representation stated in the Address to be possessed by the King, implied, like all other Magisterial authority, a duty to exercise it for the general good---That the exclamations, now so common, that the King would pay no attention to the sentiments of the People, were premature, and would continue to be so until the Nation in general were prevailed on to require of him to use this part of his authority in a just and equitable manner; and, lastly, that if no other mode of presentment, except through the Privy Council, could be found, still the publication of the Address would counteract any wish of theirs to mutilate or suppress it.

On the Question being put, there appeared a large Majority in favour of the Address:---and a Motion being made and seconded, that Citizen Earl STANHOPE

be requested to present the same, it was carried unanimously.

A number of Resolutions were then proposed, which, after some Amendments and Additions, were severally put and carried, as follow :

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

1st. That, believing the distresses of this Country to be owing to the want of a free and equal Representation of the People in the Commons House of Parliament, we think it our duty, at the present alarming crisis, to call the public attention to this important subject, and request their co-operation and assistance.

2dly. That we are well assured our Fellow Countrymen will never experience any alleviation of these distresses, until they obtain their natural and undoubted Rights, “ Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments,”

3dly. That we view with horror and detestation the present cruel, unjust, and unnecessary War, which we believe was solely designed to destroy the Liberties of Britain and annihilate those of France; and as the dreadful scarcity and high price of provisions are to be attributed to this cause, we are fully convinced that the only means of removing these, and preventing future calamities, will be immediately to acknowledge the BRAVE French Republic, and to obtain a speedy and lasting Peace.

4thly. That the event of the late State Trials has clearly manifested the innocence of this Society, and fixed the guilt on those who truly deserve punishment---
THEIR PERSECUTORS!

5thly. That the manly, firm, and consistent conduct of Citizens Earl STANHOPE and R. B. SHERIDAN, has shewn us that we have *one* honest Man in *each* House of Parliament, and calls for our admiration and applause.

6thly. That, fully convinced of the legality of our proceedings, and consistent with our principles, we treat with contempt and disregard the malicious insinuations and ill-founded assertions of our enemies; and as the best proof, notwithstanding the idle threats of corrupt and desperate Ministers, we have again dared to meet in the open face of day, and call upon our Countrymen to testify for our legal and peaceable conduct, and to assure them that, considering their cause as our own, we will not be deterred from pursuing the grand object for which we have associated, until we have obtained a speedy and effectual Redress.

It was afterwards Resolved,

7thly. That the Thanks of this Society be given to Citizens ERSKINE and GIBBS, for their able and eloquent Defence of the Prisoners at the late Trials, and to Citizens CLARKSON and FOULKES, for their judicious management of the same.

8thly. That the Thanks of this Society be given to the surrounding Multitude, (the largest ever assembled upon any occasion), for their peaceable and orderly behaviour at the present Meeting.

After a Motion of Adjournment had been put and carried, the last Resolution was communicated by Citizen JONES, in the following manner :

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS!

I hope the event of this truly great and glorious day will fully prove to the world that a very large body of the people can, even in the most critical and perilous times, assemble to deliberate upon public measures, without the smallest violation of order or the slightest breach of decorum. If there be any here present, who have come from motives of curiosity or suspicion, they must, if they faithfully report us, declare that our conduct upon this occasion has been strictly legal and constitutional, and frankly acknowledge, that the

Friends of Reform are indeed the Friends of Peace! It has been said, that we should be interrupted and dispersed by the interference of a military force; I believe it was an *idle*, I am sure it was an *useless* threat: I wish we were surrounded by soldiers, and that they could be spectators of the whole of our proceedings, because I am sure that they would soon perceive the truth and justice of our declarations; and, if required to *act*, would *fight* not against, but *for the People!* But although this would be an infallible consequence of ill-timed severity, I hope there never will come a time, when the Nation shall be reduced to such an extremity, but that reason and remonstrance alone will be always sufficient to produce the desired effects. We have now, I hope, completed in a satisfactory manner the business for which we have assembled; it remains only for me to return you our sincere and hearty acknowledgments for the patient attention and favourable reception which we have this day experienced, and to hope that you will not forget the important cause for which we are associated; and we trust that you will immediately unite your exertions with ours, and that ere long the London Corresponding Society and the British Nation will be **ONE AND INDIVISIBLE!**

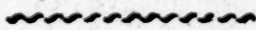
Citizen JONES having quitted the Chair,

IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED,

That the Thanks of this Meeting be given to Citizen JONES for his manly, judicious, and spirited Conduct in the Business of this Day.

(Signed)

JOHN GALE JONES, Chairman.
JOHN ASHLEY, Secretary.



Agreeable to the Resolution of the General Meeting, a Deputation was appointed by the Executive Committee to wait on Citizen Earl STANHOPE respecting the Presentment of the Address to the King ; but, after some loss of time; the Committee finding his Lordship's engagement in a naval experiment rendered his return to London uncertain, and a general anxiety for the publication of the proceedings prevailing among all descriptions of persons, they appointed a deputation of six Citizens*, by whom the Address to the King was delivered at the office of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on Wednesday the 15th of July, 1795.

*J. G. JONES,

J. BARTON,

A. GALLAWAY,

J. MAXWELL,

J. MOODY,

R. L. JONES.



(2)

At our late General Meeting there appeared to be many Persons anxious to become Members: by leaving their Names, Residences, and Occupations, with any of the undermentioned Persons, they will, if approved, be admitted :

- J. ASHLEY, *Shoemaker*, No. 6, Fisher Street, Red Lion Square ;
 - J. POWELL, *Baker*, Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road ;
 - T. G. BALLARD, *Bookseller*, Bedford Court, Covent Garden ;
 - G. RIBEAU, *Bookseller*, 434, Strand, opposite Buckingham Street ;
 - R. HODGSON, *Hatter*, 10, Broadway, Westminster ;
 - C. COOPER, *Grocer*, 67, New Compton Street, Soho ;
 - R. OLIPHANT, *Taylor*, 3, Angel Street, St. Martin's-le-Grand ;
 - J. SMITH, *Bookseller*, Portsmouth Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields ;
 - R. LEE, *Bookseller*, Haymarket ;
 - T. HARTLEY, *Shoemaker*, Prospect Row, South Side of St. George's Fields.
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